



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

EVALUATING THE RISK OF LEAD IN SCHOOL DRINKING WATER

Rock County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Lead is a hazard known to slow brain development in children and leads to lifelong health effects. Lead in drinking water is one way children can be poisoned. While municipal water is tested for lead before it's distributed, water from the faucets, water fountains, and other locations that deliver the water often go untested. To address this issue, Rock County Health Department staff applied for and received funding from the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.

THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S SOLUTION

In collaboration with their county school districts, health department staff wanted to test water in schools for lead. Staff offered free testing to 49 schools and Head Start programs, and 18 schools agreed to participate. In total, 192 initial samples were collected using [the EPA's school lead sampling guidelines](#). Of those samples, 24 (13%) had elevated levels of lead (greater than 15 ppb). Staff retested all locations with elevated levels.

All schools were given information on their test results, potential health risks, and short-term and long-term lead reduction strategies, if applicable. Short-term strategies included actions such as shutting off water to fixtures with high lead levels, replacing plumbing fixtures, regular flushing of water lines, and designating drinking water locations with low lead levels. Health department staff provided messaging and template letters that schools could send to parents and staff.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Of the 18 schools that participated, 15 had at least one location with an elevated lead level. All these schools also had locations with low lead levels that children could immediately begin using instead. Health department staff continue to provide consultation to schools that are implementing short-term and long-term lead reduction strategies. In total, about 8,000 students were impacted by this project. Four additional schools that initially decided not to participate in the project did ultimately decide to conduct their own testing or hire consultants to perform testing. Health department staff report stronger relationships with schools as a result of the project—several school partnerships have expanded into other areas of public health.

EXPLORE YOUR COUNTY'S
LEAD DATA:

dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM

Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

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